



Worldwide attack on fundamental civic freedoms laid bare by new online tool

CIVICUS Monitor rates civic space around the world; documents violations of rights

Johannesburg, 24 October 2016 – More than three billion people live in countries where the rights to protest, organize and speak out are currently being violated according to the [CIVICUS Monitor](#), the first-ever online tool to track and compare civic freedoms on a global scale.

The new tool, launched in beta today by the global civil society alliance CIVICUS, rates countries based on how well they uphold the three fundamental rights that enable people to act collectively and make change: freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression.

Of the 104 countries currently rated, it finds that civic space in 16 countries - Bahrain, Burundi, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Laos, Libya, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, UAE and Vietnam - is closed, a rating characterised by an atmosphere of fear and violence, and severe punishment for those who dare to disagree with authorities. A further 32 countries are rated repressed, meaning that 3.2 billion people live in countries where civic space is either repressed or closed.

Twenty-one countries are rated obstructed and 26 narrowed. Just nine countries were rated as open, meaning the state safeguards space for civil society and provides platforms for dialogue. There were violations of civic freedoms in every region of the world, but these are more concentrated in Africa, the Middle East and the Americas - Annex I below provides full country ratings.

"The CIVICUS Monitor shows that far from valuing citizen action, states are cracking down on protesters, shutting down organisations on the flimsiest of pretexts, and brutally silencing dissent," said Dr Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, Secretary-General of CIVICUS. *"Governments should not fear people power, they should be harnessing its potential."*

"Time and time again, civil society is at the forefront of the response to the world's most pressing problems: the refugee crisis, climate change, corruption. A truly free and vibrant civil society is our best response to exclusion and intolerance – if the assault on civic freedoms continues at this pace, we



cannot hope to achieve the brighter future for all imagined by the Sustainable Development Goals,” said Sriskandarajah.

The CIVICUS Monitor also documents attacks on civil society with updates every weekday. Analysis of more than 200 updates to the CIVICUS Monitor over the past four months has found:

- Detention of activists (68 cases), use of excessive force against protesters (62 cases) and attacks on journalists (37 cases) were the three most common violations of civic freedoms
- Activists were most likely to be detained over criticism of authorities (37%), human rights monitoring (29%) or political divisions or conflict (16%)
- Excessive force was most likely to be used against protesters who criticise government decisions or corruption (29%), call for action on human rights abuses (20%) or call for basic social or economic freedoms (20%)
- Journalists were most likely to be attacked covering protests (26%) or conflicts (19%), or because of their ethnicity, religious or political affiliation (14%)
- In the vast majority of cases, the state is the perpetrator of violations

“Attacks on those who speak out against their leaders are becoming increasingly brazen – and it’s because governments know their actions will go unpunished,” said lead researcher Cathal Gilbert. *“By collating these attacks, we hope the CIVICUS Monitor will serve as a wake-up call to the international community. We are inspired by the innovative ways that local civil society is resisting this assault, but it is imperative that global leaders do not stand by silently as their allies and trade partners crush domestic dissent.”*

Ratings are based on a combination of inputs from local civil society activists, regional civil society experts and research partners, existing assessments by national and international civil society organisations, user-generated input and media-monitoring. Local views are prioritised. At launch the CIVICUS Monitor will offer ratings of civic space in 104 countries and updates for most countries in the world. The number of countries rated will increase over time, with ratings for all countries available in 2017.

Unique amongst global measures of freedom, democracy and governance, the CIVICUS Monitor will be updated each weekday, and users are invited to contribute in order to improve accuracy.

CIVICUS hopes the CIVICUS Monitor will be an invaluable tool allowing activists, journalists, civil society organisations, academic institutions and the general public to assess how well their governments are enabling civic freedoms, as enshrined in national constitutions and guaranteed in international law, as well as through intergovernmental commitments such as the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), [Open Government Partnership](#) and the [Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation](#).



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Notes to Editors

The CIVICUS Monitor is available at <https://monitor.civicus.org>

For more information or to set up an interview, please contact CIVICUS' global press office on media@civicus.org. Interviews can be arranged with CIVICUS Secretary General Danny Sriskandarajah and CIVICUS Monitor lead researcher Cathal Gilbert, as well as regional researchers located in different countries.

CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world.

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Annex I – CIVICUS Monitor ratings, October 2016

Closed (16 countries): Bahrain, Burundi, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Laos, Libya, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, UAE and Vietnam

Repressed (32 countries): Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Cambodia, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, China, Colombia, Djibouti, DRC, Egypt, Gambia, Honduras, Iraq, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Republic of the Congo, Russia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela, Yemen, Zimbabwe

Obstructed (21 countries): Armenia, Bhutan, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Moldova, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Ukraine

Narrowed (26 countries): Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Comoros, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, France, Georgia, Japan, Poland, South Africa, Spain, United Kingdom, Uruguay, USA

Open (9 countries): Andorra, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden

Regional breakdown

Closed countries: Africa 7, Middle East 5, Asia 3, Americas 1

Repressed countries: Africa 14, Middle East 3, Asia 7, Americas 4, Europe 4

Obstructed countries: Africa 4, Middle East 1, Asia 7, Americas 5, Europe 4

Narrowed countries: Africa 4, Americas 10, Asia 2, Europe 10

Open countries: Europe 9